

Ask Miriam...

Individuals and families in the community are faced with challenging issues and concerns regarding their social, emotional and psychological health. Through the cooperation of **The Jewish World**, Jewish Family Services will offer responses.

Q. Dear Miriam,

My wife and I both had previous marriages and children from each of those relationships. Now we are a blended family of mine, hers and ours.

It works pretty well most of the time, but with the holidays approaching we are having some trouble deciding where the children will be. There are multiple pairs of grandparents who have been involved with the children and want to be part of the holiday observances.

How do we work this out to give everyone some time but not make the holidays a zoo like experience?

Holiday Dilemma

A. Holiday Dilemma,

Your situation is representative of many families today.

It is an opportunity for families to create new traditions creating holiday celebrations that meet their needs, but maintain the integrity of the holiday.

Start by speaking with all of the grandparents and present the dilemma. You need their input into finding a solution focused on the comfort and well-being of the children. If you get all of the family members to work with you, you then share ownership of the solution.

Perhaps you can divide the celebrations so that everyone has some time with grandchildren during the year, but not at every holiday. You can vary where the children celebrate from year to year so all of the grandparents get to celebrate all of the holidays over time.

Some holidays are more important than others. Maybe some of the grandparents don't want to participate at every holiday.

Yes, this all takes some extra planning, but it is crucial to keep the generational connection for your children.

We find it is sometimes more difficult to protect the rights of grandparents who are involved in a divorce situation than those of the parents.

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Q. Dear Miriam,

Our family recently experienced the loss of a beloved family member.

My husband and I disagreed about whether the children should attend the funeral and burial.

They did not go, but my husband feels strongly that they should have.

The children are 8, 10, and 12 years of age. I think that the experience of a funeral and burial is too traumatic for children of their ages.

My husband says they need to understand that death is part of the life cycle.

Who is correct?

Dealing With Death

A. Dear Dealing With Death,

I'll start with a good Jewish answer, it all depends.

Age alone is not the only criteria that should be used. How close were the children to the deceased? How much did you discuss the illness or age factors leading to the death with your children? How much have they been aware of your reactions and feelings?

As a general answer, it is not necessarily inappropriate for young children from about age 8 up to attend a funeral or burial.

I find it interesting that in our society, we are quite willing to talk about and involve children in the death of a family pet, but not with the death of a relative.

We need to work on our own comfort level with dealing with death in order to help our children be part of the life cycle in appropriate ways.

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Miriam Adler, A.C.S.W., C.S.W., is assistant director of J.F.S. She answers most frequently asked questions. please send questions to "Ask Miriam," c/o Jewish Family Services of NENY, 877 Madison Ave., Albany, NY 12208 or e-mail madler@jfsneny.org or call 518-482-8856.